

20 July 2003

Mr. David Mackey
360 Elm St.
Pittsfield, Mass 01201
#413-499-7740

To Whom It May Concern,

RE: Housatonic River Study Reports,

First off as an avid hunter and fisherman, averaging over 200 days a year afield, I am of course interested in any study that directly affects my outdoor activities. This recent report in the Berkshire Eagle with regards to PCB's and deformed fish is absurd in my opinion. I don't mind studies, but let's not call something what it's not. I'll be direct to the point, first off I have fished the Housatonic for over 40 years. I fished it earlier in my career when the stench of the river would give me a headache if I spent any amount of time on it. In the early and late-sixties I killed and ate hundreds of frogs out of Woods Pond, and fish. I fished it when you could cast a sinking lure out on the surface and it would not sink and lay on the surface scum. When the lure eventually sank, it took the scum with it. Over the last 20 years, I have noticed that the river is now beautiful again, and I always have called it one of Berkshire Counties best kept secrets. The people who fish this river and canoe on it know exactly what I'm talking about. Also, if you know the river, you'll know that there are dozens and dozens of backwater areas that go back a quarter mile and are a quarter mile wide. To say you are just going to clean up the river is like saying your toilet just overflowed with sewage all over your bathroom floor, and all you are going to do is just clean up the toilet. It took you fowever to do just the little section here by my house off Newell St., and I'll tell you, that was the easy part, wait till you get into the jungle area I call it, swamps and backwaters, and.....from here to Connecticut?? No Sir, not in your lifetime. Hey, we screwed up, but let's not make things worse, unless of course you have your own agendas.

As for the fish being deformed, with their air bladders hanging out of their bodies?? On approximately 50 percent of the fish: where did you come up with this??? I have fished the Housatonic hundreds of days and have taken hundreds of fish out of Woods Pond and up for over a mile up river from there. Huge Northern Pike, large bass, perch, and Brown Trout you have to see to believe, and the only thing hanging out of their bodies was my lure. I have about 100 photos of different fish that I have taken out of this area over the last several years and I would be glad to send them on to you if you wish. The only deformity I can see is, they are big and strong for their size. One thing, I have notice the color on let's say the yellow perch and some of the bass is a little off color, however, fish do change color to fit their environment; and I have occasionally noticed sores on the gill plates on some of the bass and perch from time to time, but I have also seen these same sores on fish that I have taken on Ashmere Lake, Thousand Acres, Stockbridge Bowl, etc.

In closing, it's my opinion that you should leave the river alone. It will cleanse itself in time, a lot faster than you can clean it and better, too.. Also, I just wondering, who was the proud recipient of this river bottom you removed from the Newell Street Area??

David Mackey

*E-mail to GEPittsfield@sra.com
and mailed to A1500 Wolfe, MNG Center
SRA - 2801 Clarendon Blvd
Suite 100, Arlington, VA 22201*

THE BERKSHIRES

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Saturday, July 19, 2003

EPA discusses report on PCBs' effects on animals

By Derek Gentile
Berkshire Eagle Staff

LENOX — A team of Environmental Protection Agency consultants presented details of a recent EPA report on PCB risks to fish and animals along the Housatonic River at a public informational session Thursday evening.

The findings came as no surprise to a majority of the 30 or so people attending the session. In July 2001, the EPA released a preliminary study that warned of risks to animal and plant life, particularly those species inhabiting the 10 1/2 miles of the river from south of the GE plant to Woods Pond.

"This was the most comprehensive study of a contaminated site that any of us are aware of," said John Lortie, a senior biologist and EPA consultant.

Profoundly affected

The final report, released a week ago, found that the length and breadth of the river's rich ecosystem has been profoundly and adversely affected by the proliferation of contaminants, specifical-

Exposure to PCBs in Woods Pond reduced the reproductive performance of virtually every animal tested.

ly polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs).

The report was based on a series of studies carried out by the EPA and GE on the Housatonic River over a five-year span.

The studies center on a portion of the Housatonic River from the confluence of the east and west branches of the river, located south of Pittsfield, to the Connecticut state line, a distance of about 54 miles as the twisting river flows.

Last month, the EPA released a human health risk assessment that concluded — as expected — that the PCB pollution presents a variety of health risks to humans.

The pair of reports will play a key role in determining how much of the river south of Pittsfield will be cleaned. Under the terms of a consent decree finalized in the fall of 2002, the EPA and GE agreed to dredge the first two miles below the GE plant.

A plan for reducing the remainder of the PCB pollution south of that point will hinge, in part, on these reports. The EPA is expected to announce its decision in 2006. General Electric will bear the cost of the cleanup, although it can appeal the final report.

The release of the report on the risks to wildlife coincided with the start of a 30-day public comment period.

When the report was released last week, GE responded by criticizing the study as purely a "laboratory look" at the Housatonic.

The company contends that its own studies will refute much of the EPA's findings.

Gary Sheffer, a GE spokesman, asserted-

EPA, continued on B4



Stefanie Cohen photo
Bill Shein, 36, of Monterey plans to travel the country as Will Markson, a mock presidential candidate.

Comedic
campaign
running
vs. apathy

Fishing on the brink

EPA details PCB threats to animals, fish in river

EPA from B1

ed that "actual, in-the-field studies of the ecosystem found very viable and healthy populations along the river. The EPA's studies are not actual field studies."

But Lortie, the EPA consultant, noted Thursday night that more than 9,700 sediment samples and 2,000 tissue samples were taken for the tests.

Among the findings detailed Thursday night was that exposure to PCBs in the Woods Pond area reduced the reproductive performance of virtually every animal tested.

In some cases, as with worms and mussels, concentrations of more than 500 parts per million killed the creatures.

That figure, generated some discussion. Benno Friedman, a longtime ecological activist, noted that 500 ppm was extremely high. The Woods Pond area, he said, averaged around 200 ppm.

Hot spot

"It may be an anomaly, but that's a hot spot," he said. "At this late stage, to hear the figure 500 [ppm], that's unusual. I'd just like to draw it to your attention."

The studies also show that many members of the ecosystem, such as amphibians, fish and even minks and otters, displayed deformities and physical abnormalities far above the accepted norms.

Fish, for example, according to the study, displayed liver damage, abnormal gonadal development and swim bladders located on the outer portion of the skin. Normally, according to Garry Lawrence, a senior risk assessor for EVS Environmental Consultants, a swim bladder is inside a fish's body.

"In fact, a signature of PCB contamination is a swim bladder located outside the body," he said.

In Woods Pond, for example, almost 50 percent of the fish studied had such a characteristic.

Despite that fact, the EPA char-

acterized the risk to fish south of Pittsfield as "low," because the PCBs have not adversely affected the overall population, according to the study.

That prompted another observation from Friedman.

"We're at a kind of description nexus," he said. "We have a high percentage of deformed fish, almost 50 percent in Woods Pond. To characterize it as low risk because there doesn't seem to be an impact on the overall population, well, that's kind of tunnel vision."

"That's a reasonable point, Benno," said EPA Project Manager Susan Svirsky. "And we ourselves struggled with those labels. But that's why we have a comment period over the next 30 days. That's a very good place to bring that up."

Lower reproductive rates

The animal population was also adversely affected. The EPA study noted that minks and otters had lowered reproductive rates that approached zero in some cases because of PCB exposure.

In addition, minks were found to have lesions on their jaws and their offspring had low survival rates. Shrews were found to have lowered body weights.

Birds were the only species that apparently experienced little or no adverse effects from PCB exposure. But several EPA experts conceded that some of the studies may not have had enough data to present a more well-rounded picture.

The full EPA report can be seen at the reference department of the Berkshire Athenaeum in Pittsfield (499-9480) or at the Simon's Rock College library in Great Barrington (528-7274). It can be viewed on line at www.epa.gov/ne/ge.

The public comment period expires Aug. 13. Comments can be e-mailed to GEPittsfield@sra.com, or to Alison Wolfe, MNG Center at SRA, 2801 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 100, Arlington, Va. 22201 (703-284-9492).